

INTERVIEW

# 'I would like my songs to be like space food'

*Kathryn Williams' deep yet digestible songs endear her to folkies, but she is stirring up the waters by plugging in for her latest pop project. Tamzin Lewis talks to her about ponds, poetry and Portishead*

I'm not sure how you can "accidentally stockpile seven albums" but singer-songwriter Kathryn Williams has managed to do it. Since her second son Ted was born two years ago, Kathryn has written reams of material, worked with numerous musicians and established her first proper band.

"I used to put things off, meander, and make about ten cups of tea before doing anything, and now I am very focused," she says when we meet at her husband Neil's Settle Down Cafe in Newcastle. "I produce a lot more in a short time."

"It sounds like I am showing off but I'm not!" she adds. "I actually feel quite lazy most of the time. But every Monday I work all day and a lot of the night. Having that repetition has been good and I keep making albums instead of having holidays."

The latest album-holiday swap is *The Pond*, a two-year project described by her publicity folk as a "democratic mud-pit". While it seems like a fairly natural progression from her last album *The Quickening* and side project *The Crayonettes* with lots of tape loops, hypnotic tunes, references to 60s and 70s pop, the influence of trip-hop's darkness represents a departure from her folk roots.

Mum-of-two Kathryn says: "The Pond is fantastically enjoyable and quite technological and we try to be innovative. It will be like when Bob Dylan went on stage with an electric guitar. My manager said 'Get ready to be booed by the folkies!'"

The Pond is a collaboration between Kathryn, who lives in Newcastle, and London-based husband and wife Simon Edwards, a founding member of Fairground Attraction, and Ginny Clee who was one half of *The Dear Janes*. Kathryn

first met bass player Simon while recording with folk star Neill MacColl and has worked closely with him on her last three releases.

She says: "When I go to London I often stay with him and Ginny and we get on really well. They have a studio in their cellar and we just started talking about how to make a record together. There has been lots of to-ing and fro-ing and slowly working out what we wanted to make."

Bebop, the first song they worked on features the rapper, Kirsch, and was influenced by bands such as the Penguin Cafe Orchestra and the experimental composer Philip Glass. "Our influences are ones which you wouldn't normally associate with folk and our songs are mixed up in a more Massive Attack or Portishead way," Kathryn says.

Simon was part of the Bristol scene in the 1990s and the vibe is also created by producer Adrian Utley, a member of Portishead, who helped produce their seminal album *Dummy*. Kathryn, 38, says: "We had a list of a lot of people we wanted to work with and at the top was Adrian. He said he would do it for free which was unbelievable. So his payment was one of my paintings."

The band's name is attributed to the wooded bathing ponds on Hampstead Heath where Simon and Ginny, a music tutor, swim occasionally. Kathryn says: "They told me how brilliant it was and I jumped in this brown icy water and swam with ducks. It was brilliant but I don't think I'll do it again. However I liked the idea of the band being called *The Pond*, it is very English."

So how does it feel to be in a band after doing her own thing since releasing her first record *Dog Leap Stairs*, named after the

Quayside steps, in 1999 Kathryn answers: "It feels cool to say you are in a band. Simon has done a lot of the engineering and producing, and I have turned up with songs and lyrics. Like Leonard Cohen says all you can do is to 'serve the song'. Put your ego aside."

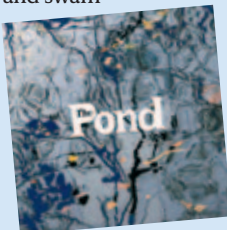
"We make joint decisions and it's actually lovely to share it and we are equal members. The downside is that after 12 years of being the boss, now I have to listen to other people. I listen and pretend I agree!"

And even though she is loving *The Pond*, Kathryn also likes having "the security of knowing you can do whatever you want" with her own music. She currently has the task of whittling about 40 songs down to a new solo album. And she feels her writing has taken a new lease of life after taking a creative writing course at Newcastle's Lit and Phil with the poet Kathleen Kenny.

Kathryn says: "I am trying to work in a poetic way by honing down or boiling down. The thing I like about poetry is that you can read a poem in five minutes but it can last with you all day. It can take a long time to digest."

"It's like an espresso. I would like my songs to be like that or maybe space food. I am not trying to be clever lyrically but I am trying to create pictures in your head."

She adds: "Poetry exercises make you fitter for when you go back to your own writing. It is about moving forward and finding ways to better yourself."



*Kathryn Williams presents The Pond is released by One Little Indian on May 28. The band play The Sage Gateshead on June 3 For more information, [www.thepondmusic.com](http://www.thepondmusic.com)*

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Kathryn with Ginny Clee and Simon Edwards